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SUBJECT: Casamance rebels kill Seven Senegalese soldiers

¶1. (SBU) Summary: 2009 has had an uptick of violent assaults by gunmen allegedly belonging to MFDC (Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance) resulting in numerous civilian deaths. However, a more worrying development is the resumption of attacks against the Senegalese army. On October 2, MFDC rebels ambushed an army vehicle on a muddy road in the Kolda region. They killed six soldiers and wounded four; a day later one of the wounded died. It is feared that if these attacks continue that the army will respond in kind thus increasing the intensity of the conflict. End Summary.

Escalation of violence

¶2. (SBU) On the afternoon of October 2, a Senegalese army vehicle was ambushed in the village of Sare Boya, in the Kolda region, two miles away from the Bissau-Guinean border. When the vehicle was bogged down in a muddy pool, soldiers got out to help extract it from the mud. It was at that moment that gunmen believed to be members of MFDC ambushed the unit with guns and RPG-7s. Six soldiers died at the scene and four were wounded. A day later, one of the wounded soldiers passed away. One of the dead is reported to be an army captain. The Senegalese army has not sustained such heavy casualties since the 1990s. With President Abdoulaye Wade's election in 2000, the GOS has been generally successful in restraining the army's use of force in Casamance. A civil society leader who follows the conflict closely told Embassy that the attack was conducted by men affiliated with Edouard Diedhiou, Commander of the Fouladou rebel base in the Region of Kolda. This group is believed to be close to dissidents of the Kassolol branch of the MFDC that attacked the Senegalese army last month and killed one soldier on the outskirts of Ziguinchor.

A deadly message

¶3. (SBU) This attack comes on the heels of a meeting that President Wade held with Casamance leaders (The "Cadre Casamancais") to get their views on how to resolve the conflict. A journalist, who is a native of the Casamance, told the Embassy that MFDC hardliners reacted violently as they felt that they had not mandated these leaders to speak on their behalf. He added that rebels in the Maquis have told him that they do not trust the numerous self-appointed intermediaries that Wade meets and that they are faced with the problem of how to engage the GOS and to identify credible interlocutors within the government.

Senegalese soldiers must leave Casamance

¶4. (SBU) A recurrent MFDC demand has been that Senegalese soldiers return to their positions of 1982, before the conflict started, when they were confined to their barracks in the regions of Ziguinchor, Bignona, and Kolda. The MFDC has aggressively opposed the recent deployment of many small combat units by the Senegalese army in an attempt to deter the hijacking of passenger vehicles by rebels. An Embassy source noted that the increase in patrols conducted by

Senegalese soldiers is likely to result in more clashes with the MFDC. He added that another reason why MFDC rebels are frustrated and demand the departure of the soldiers is their view that "all Senegalese soldiers do here is impregnate our women."

COMMENT

¶5. (SBU) As the government keeps the Casamance conflict on the back burner, so will the frustration and concomitant violence increase. In the meantime the MFDC is believed to have used the prolonged ceasefire to acquire weapons and, although their force and logistics remain primitive, it would be very difficult for the GOS to fund a large scale counterinsurgency in the region. Negotiations seems to be the only viable solution but as long as the government remains hesitant and seeks peace without political concessions, granting the region more say in its governance, then all efforts will be for naught.

SMITH